Diversity Leadership Guide

Teamwork: The Individual's Role

> As we continue our Centerwide dialogue on teams, we turn to the role of the individual and his/her contributions to the goals. "A team member should contribute knowledge, experience, time, and support to both the team's work and the building of a cohesive team so that the mutually agreed upon goals of the team are achieved."
>
> Fran Rees, Teamwork from Start to Finish

Team Collaboration

You can't have a team without first having a collection of individuals. But a team is more than just the sum of its parts. Effective team members go beyond themselves and their personal desires and goals. If you want to be an effective team member, your challenge is to put the team first—which means maximizing your contributions to help the team accomplish its purpose.

If you were asked, would you be able to explain the difference between working collaboratively with your teammates and working cooperatively with them?

A group of individuals working together in an agreeable manner is engaging in cooperative teamwork. Collaborative teamwork, on the other hand, involves individuals working together as a single unit. Each team member brings value to the relationship to create a synergistic team environment.

High-performance teams, by definition, are teams that engage in collaborative teamwork. To help you help your team become a high-performance team, you'll need to apply the three strategies for working collaboratively with teammates:

- Partner with someone whose abilities complement yours.
- Put the team's needs ahead of your own.
- Share your knowledge.

Team Collaboration (cont'd)

Partnering effectively

Seeking a partner on your team is a good way to work collaboratively with others. But you have to choose wisely and find someone whose abilities complement yours. A good example would be: "Let's team up. I have strong organizational skills, and you're deadline driven." If you're organized but a procrastinator and your teammate is deadline driven but disorganized, you can learn from each other and maybe even build up your respective skill sets.

Ask yourself the following questions to determine whether you applied this strategy effectively:

- Did my respective partner's strength compensate for my weakness?
- Did my strength compensate for his weakness?
- Were we able to improve our respective weaknesses through the partnership?

Putting the team's needs first

Another way to work collaboratively with others is to put the team's needs ahead of your own. What would you say if your boss told you she wanted you to go on a business trip with a team member whose professional abilities you respect but whose personality repels you? The best response would be: "I knew this was a possibility. I want the team to succeed, and in the scheme of things, this is a small   sacrifice." You're letting your boss know going out of town with this teammate isn't your number one choice but that the results will be worth it.

It might be hard to believe, but you truly will win when you put your team first. Ask yourself these questions to assess your application of this strategy:

- Did I set aside my needs for the betterment of the team?
- Did I truly believe it?
- Did I convey that belief?
- If I expressed my initial disappointment, did I make it clear that I understood the move was for the good of the team?

Sharing your knowledge

Knowledge, they say, is power. Put the good of the team ahead of your own needs; it is critical that you empower the team, not just yourself. When working collaboratively with your teammates, ask yourself:

- If I knew something that I could—and should—share with my teammates, did I? Or did I keep something back for my own use or pleasure?
- If I didn't share some information, will the team suffer for it?

By implementing these three strategies for working collaboratively with your teammates, you'll be helping your team become a high-performance team—the best of the best.

Proactive Team Members

When it comes to teamwork, do you consider yourself proactive or reactive?

Is it time you took a more proactive stance? If so, rest assured that you aren't the only team member who's had to switch gears from reactive to proactive. A lot of people on teams that have since become high performance teams have had to make the same mental shift. There are three steps you'll need to follow to be a proactive team member.

1. **Identify opportunities for action**

    Don't wait for things to happen. Instead, look for potential problems, errors, and causes of concern. Talk with other proactive members of your team, and play devil's advocate. Chances are, you'll find additional items for discussion.

    Think about the scope of the changes you want to make. Try to keep the scope small and manageable. It's important that you be as clear and specific as possible. The more specific you are, the easier you'll find it is to carry out Step 2.

2. **Take the necessary action**

    As soon as you've clearly identified all problem areas, do what needs to be done to address them. Even if it means your project might take a little longer, look into it now. The sooner you address the issue, the less it will cost in time and money. Keep in mind that your personal authority affects your ability to take the necessary changes. If you have the authority to tell someone else to make a change, be sure any urgency comes across loud and clear.

    In an ideal teamwork situation, all teammates provide input. Never force a team member to abide by changes he didn't hear about first. If you want to make changes that will affect your team, talk it over and get a consensus first.

3. **Achieve goals beyond what is required**

    Don't settle. Instead, overachieve. Typical proactive team members have a tendency to promise the minimum and do what they can to deliver the maximum. That way, no one is ever disappointed, and most people are usually pleasantly surprised.

When you take these three steps, your extra effort won't go unnoticed or unappreciated. In fact, you'll most likely find that your teammates will begin to expend a little additional effort as well.

Ideas for Dialogue

*   Is your experience on your team or in your organization one of cooperative teamwork or collaboration? Explain
*   What are some examples from your own experiences of putting the team first?
*   What are your thoughts on the use of knowledge as power? What have your experiences been?
*   What is the difference between tolerance and acceptance?

Tolerance Within Teams

When you're receptive to the diverse opinions, perceptions, and beliefs your teammates hold, you give yourself permission to grow and change, to become a better teammate. Use these strategies to demonstrate tolerance on your team:

- **Acknowledge others' rights to hold differing opinions**

  When a teammate is standing his ground and he's the only person on that side of the imaginary line, take a minute to remember what it felt like when you were the person holding the unpopular opinion in the group. Then take a deep breath and wade back into the argument. But this time, instead of arguing for your side, offer a supportive statement on behalf of your lone teammate.

  A supportive statement validates a person's right to hold a differing opinion. It doesn't mean that you've suddenly decided he's right; it just means that you're acknowledging his right to hold an opinion different from yours.

  An excellent example of a supportive statement is, "I don't necessarily agree with you, but I'm willing to listen to what you have to say."

- **Treat others with respect**

  When you demonstrate respect for others, you're protecting their self-esteem and building a relationship based on trust and cooperation. One way to demonstrate respect is to use objective language instead of critical or judgmental language. For example, "We've completed 80 percent of our goal this month," instead of "You're behind schedule."

  Limit your use of *you*, and use *I* and *we* instead. *You* statements come across as judgmental and controlling; *I* and *we* statements focus people on the issue, not the placement of blame or judgment. For example, instead of saying, "You don't understand the problem," say, "We need to get a better handle on the problem."

  Whenever possible, add provisional qualifiers to your statements. Provisional qualifiers suggest that the speaker understands he's about to deliver an opinion, not place blame, and that he's open to other points of view. Examples of provisional qualifiers include, "In my opinion," "It seems to me," "and "According to the data I've researched."

Be supportive of your teammates' right to hold differing opinions. Respect one another. The more positive each person's outlook, the better everyone can work together. And the more positive the contributions made by each team member, the stronger the team will be.